

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The post-2015 objectives in the Euro-Mediterranean region’**

**(own-initiative opinion)**

(2015/C 383/07)

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On 22 January 2015, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

*The post-2015 objectives in the Euro-Mediterranean region.*

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 June 2015.

At its 509th plenary session, held on 1 and 2 July 2015 (meeting of 1 July 2015), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 57 votes to 22 with 7 abstentions.

**1. Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1 The EESC recommends that the UfM member States and the EU validate the SDGs agreed, by ratifying the relevant international conventions.

1.2 The EESC recommends that the UfM member States and the EU effectively protect the public investment needed to achieve the SDGs.

1.3 The EESC recommends that the UfM member States and the EU organise implementation by involving civil society and the regions at local level, as close as possible to the people.

1.4 The Committee takes note of the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs and International Relations Council held on 26 May 2015 and of the European Commission's 2015 annual report on the commitments given by the EU and the Member States on public development aid and the results that have been achieved.

1.5 It regrets, however, that the EU has given itself until 2030 to reach the target of 0,7 % of GDP <sup>(1)</sup>.

1.6 The Committee supports the EU's intention to strengthen the non-financial aspects (such as ratifying international legal instruments and combating financial crime).

1.7 It urges the Commission to adopt a coherent stance that takes account of both bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade interests and the sustainable development goals, in order to maintain the credibility of the goals and of European aid.

1.8 The Committee recommends extending both the dialogue between the social partners and the European institutions on vocational training and lifelong learning, in which it was duly invited to participate and which it helped set up <sup>(2)</sup>, and the action programmes in this area.

1.9 The Committee calls for these recommendations to be included in the EU's programme and in its neighbourhood policy: coherence between policies on trade, external affairs, development, financing and the protection of democracy and human rights, in line with the commitments given to civil society by the Commission Vice-President Federica MOGHERINI on 28 May 2015 <sup>(3)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Commissioner Neven Mimica, 508th EESC plenary session, 28 May 2015.

<sup>(2)</sup> <http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/home>

<sup>(3)</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150528\\_01\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150528_01_en.htm)

## 2. Introduction

2.1 A major item on the European and world agenda for the coming years will be the debate on the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The Euro-Mediterranean region displays some specific common characteristics requiring consideration of how to build sustainable development goals into European neighbourhood policy and into policies covering the southern Mediterranean countries. The problems of food security, poverty and social exclusion, limited access to water, the particular situation of the region's countries in democratic and economic transition and the need to restore peace and security, call for an EESC opinion that can offer guidelines for the effective application and monitoring of the post-2015 agenda in the Mediterranean.

2.2 By helping to identify the real challenges and by putting forward proposals for the Euromed region, together with civil society, the EESC can offer useful advice to the governments of this sorely-battered region and to the European institutions.

2.3 In this opinion, the European Economic and Social Committee also wishes to build on the work it has done on the sustainable development goals in general and on those concerning this geographical region, the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, in particular.

2.4 The UN Secretary General submitted a report summarising the contributions made by the open working group tasked with looking at universal post-2015 sustainable development goals, based on the adoption of the governments' declaration entitled 'The future we want' after the Rio+ 20 Conference, and which established the decision to make the Millennium goals, which are specific to the developing countries, common but differentiated goals applicable to everyone in the world, in countries that are industrialised or emerging, developing or least-developed. Extensive consultations have taken place at different regional and sub-regional levels, and the main organised civil society groups represented at the United Nations have had the opportunity to take part in these and assert their interest. Seventeen goals and 169 targets have been adopted concerning the 'means of implementation and the global partnership for sustainable development'.

2.5 Two major events that are inextricably linked to the post-2015 sustainable development goals will take place in 2015: an international conference in Addis Ababa on financing for development, in July 2015, and the 21st Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris, in late 2015.

2.6 This post-2015 sustainable development agenda seeks to establish a framework for the United Nations' future work on the ground, with a new focus on equality, social inclusion and decent work, while safeguarding sustainable sources of income for people who work, the environment, and the pace of renewal of biological and natural resources. However, this agenda takes as its starting point that the economic model governing our societies is not sustainable. This means that world leaders will have to demonstrate considerable boldness. The current economic, social and environmental and ultimately political situation is completely untenable in many parts of the world, and this holds particularly true for the Euro-Mediterranean region. To achieve the SDGs, many people maintain that, at the very least, the economic and financial principles that are currently driving economies need to be adjusted, in order to change the status quo.

2.7 In southern Europe, countries are experiencing social and economic situations that are no longer accepted by the population and which make it impossible to address environmental and climate imperatives that would give Europeans the chance to construct a different type of environmental, economic and social area. Young people, despite the investment in their education by the national or European system, do not have a framework of opportunities enabling them to flourish and contribute to the EU's economic, social and environmental competitiveness.

2.8 Few jobs have been created since 2008; in fact, many jobs have been lost and the job-creation rate has not kept pace with demographic trends or with the arrival on the market of graduates, resulting in the rejection of austerity policies with no end in sight. Public policies and services in the fields of education, health, transport and housing have suffered as a result of austerity guidelines, whereas achieving the sustainable development goals requires these services to be strengthened. The number of people who are homeless or who live in sub-standard housing is continuing to rise in the EU-28 and most of the jobs created are excessively flexible, insecure and offer no real future. The number of unpaid or poorly-paid trainees is rocketing, we are witnessing a radicalisation of European society, intolerance, hostility to others and a failure to understand, the generation gap is widening, and individualism and survival are creating a gulf between the professional political classes and frustrated citizens.

2.9 On the southern shores of the Mediterranean, we have seen the rejection of dictatorships that had appropriated economic gains, freedom of expression and equality. Many countries have changed their method of transition, shifting from the hoped-for example of national consensus for democracy to authoritarian takeover by an all-powerful military class. At the same time, radicalised groups have taken the opportunity to engage in armed occupation or to remould themselves into criminal regimes. Part of Africa now lives under this permanent threat, and the Near and Middle East are experiencing both huge population displacements and new political and military set-ups. In short, civilian populations have no time to catch their breath.

2.10 In these circumstances, it is unlikely that any sustainable development goal can be credible as a way of restoring peace, improving material well-being and building up the region's economy. It is not possible to sustainably attract investment to, or for such investment to remain and flourish in, regions that are democratically, socially and environmentally unstable. Furthermore, the fact that economic development has for many decades benefited only a minority of families and individuals or dictators has undermined those institutions that are able to operate fairly, transparently and democratically.

### 3. Environment

3.1 Facts show that the Euro-Mediterranean Region is vulnerable to environmental disasters, both land-based and at sea. According to a report (2013), the Mediterranean coastal environment provides the livelihood for at least 150 million people. The same report quotes the UNEP as identifying 13 gas plants, 55 refineries, 180 power stations, 750 yacht harbours, 286 commercial ports, 112 airports, and 238 desalination plants, along the Mediterranean coasts, with most of which being potential sources of environmental emergencies. The report states also that establishing adequate measures to mitigate the impact in case of natural or man-made disasters is a top priority for the whole region <sup>(4)</sup>.

### 4. Employment

4.1 In his speech of 28 May, Commissioner Johannes HAHN stressed the need to create 5 million new jobs *every year* to employ a growing work force and to ensure social inclusion. He also pointed out that, in order to achieve this target, the region would have to ensure economic growth of more than 6 %.

4.2 The promotion of decent jobs (objective 8) must be the key, as poor-quality work (precarious, low-paid jobs, without sustainable and universal social protection) is one of the roots of poverty. Renewed focus should therefore be placed on the quality of growth, healthy and secure employment and working conditions and social protection for workers and their families as an essential means of combating poverty and exclusion.

### 5. Private sources of funding

5.1 In order for the private sector's contribution to commercial partnerships for industrial development to be productive and effective, it must go hand in hand with a decent work agenda that is more uncompromising on ensuring decent working conditions than has been the case so far. The jobs created must, more than ever before, be high in quality and well paid, respect human health and the environment, and be covered by effective social protection <sup>(5)</sup>. This is particularly important for the MENA region, where youth unemployment is among the highest in the world and in continuous rise, and therefore there is a significant proportion of young people in active age in NEETS 'Not in employment, education, training'. Guaranteeing minimum income security to people in the informal sector is essential for social and political stability and conflict prevention, as it reduces radicalism and extremism, thereby contributing to political stability and security <sup>(6)</sup>. Initial education and ongoing training, equality, the participation of young people and women in the labour market, people's desire to be respected, the right of expression, decent pay, safety, protection of the environment and public health, early childhood education and intergenerational solidarity are aspirations common to both sides of the Mediterranean. Governments must be able to guarantee these aspirations without the threat of supranational arbitration that unilaterally protects private interests, for all the importance that we might want to accord to international trade in financing universal objectives <sup>(7)</sup>.

<sup>(4)</sup> <http://www.preventionweb.net> — Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Program (PPRD South) February 2013.

<sup>(5)</sup> See EESC opinion on social protection in European Union development cooperation (OJ C 161, 6.6.2013, p. 82).

<sup>(6)</sup> Post-2015 Objectives in the Euro-Mediterranean region, EESC hearing, 22 May 2015, Solidar vision on post 2015.

<sup>(7)</sup> EESC opinion, REX/441 (see page 49 of this Official Journal).

## 6. Means of implementation and monitoring progress towards goals

6.1 The multilateral negotiations at the WTO focus on trade as an instrument for implementing virtuous sustainable development. A number of current negotiation processes however, demonstrate a lack of consistency between certain free trade goals and the achievement of the sustainable development goals. These include agreements on services that plan to liberalise or privatise many public services that are accessible to most people and necessary to achieve goals; agreements on environmental goods, technology transfers, industrial property rights; agreements on the new information technologies, on the extractive and mining industries and on bodies for settling disputes between multinational companies and States. There are many areas in which laudable aims have their credibility undermined by the negotiations between corporate and State powers.

6.2 Trade Policy should allow developing countries policy space — including the ability to focus on impacts on unemployment, vulnerable people, gender equality and sustainable development — rather than promoting liberalisation as an end in itself. For this, we recommend a comprehensive review of all trade agreements and investment treaties to identify all areas where they may limit developing countries' ability to prevent and manage crises, regulate capital flows, protect the right to livelihoods and decent jobs, enforce fair taxation, deliver essential public services and ensure sustainable development.

6.3 Governments should undertake mandatory human rights impact assessments of multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral trade and investment agreements, focusing especially on the rights to development, and the specific rights to food, health and a livelihood, taking into account the impact on marginalised groups. This would include implementing the draft resolution, passed in the Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2014, to establish a working group to prepare an instrument imposing international human rights' legal obligations on transnational corporations.

6.4 For a set period, in which the world could be deemed to be recovering from the financial crises of 2008 (financial) and 2011 (democracy), investments in employment and the environment and relating to the post-2015 development goals should be removed from public deficit calculations, should be seen as universal, lasting and sustainable investments in the common interest, should receive zero-rate financing and should be inaccessible to hedge funds.

6.5 Combating tax evasion and tax avoidance and illicit financial flows for laundering money derived from illegal activities, including undeclared work, the trafficking of migrants or the export of non-recovered waste, should make it possible to free up the additional resources needed to achieve the SDGs<sup>(8)</sup>.

6.6 Lastly, it should be borne in mind that the existing international legal instruments are also means of implementation and that, if certain conventions — such as the fundamental ILO labour conventions, the UN Convention of 18 December 1979 on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, Convention C189 on the protection of domestic workers, and Convention C184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture, the International Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and its Optional Protocol, to name but a few — were ratified and transposed into the positive law of the UfM member States, they would constitute preferred non-financial means of implementation that would in themselves guarantee the legal (*de jure*) protection of individuals that is essential if a number of sustainable development goals are to be achieved in practice (*de facto*):

Sustainable Development Goals<sup>(9)</sup>

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

<sup>(8)</sup> At least USD 1 000 billion, according to the World Bank, the IMF, transparency.org, etc.

<sup>(9)</sup> As per Zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda as per January 2015.

- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts <sup>(10)</sup>
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

6.7 On 28 May 2015, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, together with the European Commission, co-organised a Euromed Civil Society Forum, which heard statements from Commissioner Johannes HAHN and Commission Vice-President Federica MOGHERINI, as well as the President of the European Parliament.

6.8 At this forum for discussing the EU's new Neighbourhood Policy guidelines, Commissioner HAHN highlighted the different funds that have been directly allocated to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and neighbouring countries — EUR 52 million under the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility — and spoke of the work that had been carried out, to which EUR 40 million allocated under the EU Regional Trust Fund must be added.

6.9 Lastly, reference should be made to the European Agenda on Migration, which was published by the Commission 2 weeks after the Heads of State Summit and which puts forward a tangible plan for sharing the burden of measures aimed at resettling and hosting refugees, in keeping with Article 78(3) TFEU <sup>(11)</sup>.

Brussels, 1 July 2015.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Henri MALOSSE

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<sup>(10)</sup> Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

<sup>(11)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/2015/20150527\\_02\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/2015/20150527_02_en.htm)